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Wales and the Great Famine of the early fourteenth century

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Abstract

The Great Famine of the early fourteenth century was experienced across northern Europe and generated social and economic disruption as well as significant numbers of deaths, perhaps 10 to 15 per cent of populations in some instances. There is though little or no contemporary comment on famine in Wales in this period and also only limited historical discussion to match. This paper examines the context in which famine could have operated in Wales in this period and also explores available insights into the impact of the Great Famine. The limited material suggests that the experience of Wales was generally akin to that of its neighbours.

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The so-called 'Great Famine' which struck northern Europe between 1315 and 1322 was a series of harvest failures, brought about by episodes of exceptionally wet weather; the first of these years, especially 1315 to 1316, saw a dramatic fall in grain yields and a consequent dramatic hike in grain prices, reflective of a general scarcity. A combination of poor harvest and extreme weather persisted, with some irregularity, in subsequent years and, while harvest recovered from its devastating 1316 nadir, a second wave of poor harvests, including in 1319-20 a livestock epidemic or murrain, brought a second wave of devastation to food supplies. The consequences of these serious declines in food availability were documented by

contemporaries who describe, as well as a rise in food prices and the occasional efforts of governments to manage the crisis through such efforts as price-fixing, an increase in deaths and in social disruption. Some of the more lurid accounts mention the most desperate turning to crime, the searching out of 'unclean' foods and, in some instances, cannibalism.[1]

It is generally agreed by those relatively few historians who have reviewed the evidence for famine in this period, that the great European famine was an epochal event, experienced across medieval northern and western Europe with significant and far-reaching consequences. As well as the short term consequences of major disruption to aspects of normal economic activity, a possible mortality rate, in England at least, of 10-15 per cent of the population, and the worst labouring conditions (in terms of prices relative to wages in the last millennium), the longer term consequences of the period Great Famine and its associated murrains and harvest failures into the 1320s was a slowing in population growth, a downturn in agrarian output and a retreat from marginal lands, a depleted livestock economy which took decades to recover, and a population that, according to some commentators, was

[1] A first version of this paper was prepared for the Bangor Medieval Wales colloquium, held at Bangor University, October 2016; I am most grateful for useful comments received from those attending the colloquium. Some of the research discussed here arises from a Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship (MRF-2011-014), 'The Great Famine. Dearth and society in medieval England c.1300', held by the author between 2012 and 2016. For discussions of the Great Famine, see I. Kershaw, 'The great famine and agrarian crisis in England 1315-1322', *Past and Present*, 59 (1973), 3-50, reprinted in R. H. Hilton, ed., *Peasants, knights and heretics* (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 85-132 (from which subsequent references are taken). The most authoritative general study, which provides an effective summary of writing on the Great Famine across early fourteenth-century northern Europe is provided in W. K. Jordan, *The Great Famine. Northern Europe in the Early Fourteenth Century* (Princeton, 1996).

morphologically weakened in advance of the even great disaster of epidemic disease that was to follow.[2]

Despite the scale and significance of this event, when we review the main works on the medieval European famine, however, we find little in the way of reference to Wales. Early work on medieval famine, with its emphasis on gathering qualitative accounts from the chronicles, has nothing at all to offer on Wales. So, for instance, Lucas' reasonably exhaustive trawl of the chronicles and some related sources for 1315-17 has much to say on France, the Low Countries, parts of Germany, Scandinavia, and, closer to home, England, Scotland and Ireland but nothing at all on Wales.[3] Wales does feature in William Chester Jordan's pan-European account of the Great Famine, typically in ways that are contextual and related more, directly at least, to the potential impact of warfare on regional and local economies.[4] Ian Kershaw's seminal discussion of the Great Famine, agrarian crisis and its impact, published in *Past and Present* over 40 years ago, and to which we will need to return as it sets out many of the key parameters for discussion in this area, is a study of England and, unsurprisingly therefore, includes no comment on Wales.[5]

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[2] On population, see L.R. Poos, 'The rural population of Essex in the later middle ages', *Economic History Review*, 38 (1985), 515-30; for discussion of livestock and murrains, P. Slavin, 'The great bovine pestilence and its economic and environmental consequences in England and Wales, 1318–50', *Economic History Review*, 65 (2012), 1239-1266, and for the suggestion that famine may have created a latent vulnerability in the fourteenth-century population with consequences for its capacity to cope with plague, S. DeWitte and P. Slavin, 'Between famine and death: England on the eve of the Black Death—evidence from paleoepidemiology and manorial accounts', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, xliv (2013), 37-60.

[3] H. S. Lucas, 'The great European famine of 1315, 1316 and 1317', in E. Carus-Wilson, ed., *Essays in economic history* (London, 2 vols., 1962), ii, 49-72; originally published in *Speculum* 5 (1930).

[4] For instance, Jordan, *The great famine*, pp. 21, 84-5, 98-9.

[5] Kershaw, 'Agrarian crisis'.

Even when we turn to work on medieval Wales we also find little comment on the Great Famine. This is often, as A.D. Carr notes in his study of medieval Anglessey, because there appears to be little to discuss. The assumption is, as Carr notes, that Wales must have suffered along with the rest of northern Europe, but it is difficult to be confident of any detail. Carr notes that 'for Anglessey, indeed for the whole of Gwynedd,…the historian has to proceed by silences' but assumes that, as the famine affected Scotland and Ireland, it must also have had an impact upon north Wales.[6] Historians have tended to be thrown back on inference and assumption based on incidental details, as for instance in the safe conducts issued to allow procurement of provisions for castle garrisons in north Wales in the spring of 1316: a reflection of normal activities reported or of heightened concerns during a period of shortage? There are also occasional contemporary references to shortage, as noted by J.B. Smith and Keith William-Jones in their respective discussions of the rebellion of Llewelyn Bren and the Merionethshire lay subsidy and its wider economic context; combined these offer a sense of disruption, as in the statements that there was, in the famine years, 'a great dearth of victuals in north west Wales' or a 'great dearness' in Glamorgan, but little in the way of firm detail.[7] Most recently, Matthew Stevens used the Dyffryn Clwyd court rolls, an all-but unique survival of local court records for the Welsh marches from the late thirteenth century and comparable in form to the vast array of manorial court records surviving from medieval England. While Steven's use of these records to explore famine in this context is to be applauded, his suggestion that 'the years 1312-22 amounted to a catastrophe of unheard-of proportions' and were 'arguably more severe than those visited on the average English

[6] A. D. Carr, *Medieval Anglesey* (Llangefni, 1982), p. 301.

[7] K. William-Jones, ed., *The Merioneth Lay Subsidy Roll, 1292-3* (Cardiff, 1976), p. cxxxiv; J. B. Smith, 'The rebellion of Llywelyn Bren', in T.B. Pugh, ed., *Glamorgan County History. Volume III. The Middle Ages* (Cardiff, 1971), p. 78.

community' do not sit easily with the material Stevens has analysed.[8] Stevens has based most of his conclusions on the very few instances of grain and livestock prices extracted from the rolls; these prices are certainly high, and help to confirm the view that Wales and the Marches did not escape the conditions that pertained elsewhere in norther Europe, but the sample size is so small, often no more than a single price for a year, that no strong conclusions can be drawn as to the price of grain and livestock in Dyffryn Clwyd relative to that observable in far great number in England or the consequences for the local community of these few instances of exceptional prices.[9] We will return to the information for Dyffryn Clwyd below and attempt to piece together some of the ways in which the material does, though, allow some inroads into our understanding of or at least evidence for some level of disruption during the period of famine.

The reason for this apparent neglect of Wales in the history of the great famine of the early fourteenth century is, as the above comments suggest, that relevant sources of a kind neither exist to the extent that they do elsewhere nor, therefore, permit any level of meaningful investigation. In addition, famine and its effects may simply not have presented itself so directly to contemporaries in medieval Wales. Within Wales, the small total population and the very small local populations, in some parts of Wales, especially may have

[8] M. F. Stevens, 'The great famine in Dyffryn Clwyd, 1315-1322', *Denbighshire Historical Society Transactions*, 63 (2015), 35.

[9] Stevens, 'Great famine in Dyffryn Clwyd', 21-2; see also the entries for 'wheat' and 'oats', The National Archives [hereafter TNA], SC 2/215/71-SC 2/216/5, recorded in the 'Dyffryn Clwyd Court Roll Database, 1294-1422', award numbers: R000232548; R000234070 [hereafter DCCRD]. The database arising from these projects is available for download through the UK data archive at http://www.data-archive.ac.uk/. Compare the sample size of grain prices for the same period in J. E. T. Rogers, *A History of Agriculture and Prices in England* (Oxford, 7 volumes, 1866-1902), pp. 67-89.

made the crisis of famine simply less visible and certainly less visible to the kinds of commentators who described high prices and the deaths of immigrant poor in cities such as London. The author of the London annals, for instance, talks of such scarcity that life could barely be sustained, with a quarter of wheat sold for 20, 30 or even 40s, and a rise in mortality and the message is repeated in a number of English chronicles with more or less detail;[10] while most of the English chronicles are fairly laconic in their coverage of famine, certainly in relation to other key political developments, near-contemporary Welsh chronicles do appear to offer even less in terms of commentary on famine. The Chronicles of the Princes (*Brut y Tywysogion*) offers very little comment on famine, and has, for instance, no mention of the famine and harvest failures in 1258-9, mentioned and sometimes discussed in some detail in a number of English chronicles including, most notably, Matthew Paris' *Chronica maiora*.[11] The *Brut y Tywysogion* does mention two famines, one in 993 and the second in 1173, but in the most summary of form and as an adjunct to the politics and internecine struggles of the day.[12]

Further to the last point, Wales had suffered greatly from endemic warfare and while, by the early fourteenth century, some of the worst years of military activity were passed, the famine hit during a period, at least in the south, of further disruption as a result of political

[10] *Chronicles of the Reigns of Edward I and Edward II*, ed. W. Stubbs (2 vols., Rolls Series, 1882-3), i, pp. 236, 238.

[11] *Matthaei Parisiensis Monachi Sancti Albani Chronica Majora*, ed. H. R. Luard (7 vols, Rolls Series, 1872-83), v., pp. 673-4, 690, 693-4, 701-2, 710-12, 746-7.

[12] *Brut y Tywysogion or the Chronicle of the Princes. Peniarth MS. 20 version*, trans. T. Jones (Cardiff, 1952), pp. 10; 69; the same famines are recorded in a number of European chronicles, F. Curschmann, 'Hungersnöte im Mittelalter. Ein Beitrag zur Deutschen Wirtschaftgeschicte des 8. bis 13. Jahrhunderts', *Leipziger Studien aus dem Gebiet der Geschicte, vi* (1900), pp. 107-8; 151-2.

dislocation and lawlessness. The rebellion of Llewelyn Bren, led by a disaffected local lord and occasioned by the mismanagement of Clare estates in the southern March following the death of the tenant-in-chief Gilbert de Clare at Bannockburn, illustrates the difficulties of disentangling cause and effect; that a revolt of such severity occurred at all during a period of harvest failure and significant distress, and in an area likely to have been exposed to declining yield, also reveals the uneven-ness of the potential impact of major climatic events and reductions in food supply.[13] It is striking that in the accounts of Clare lands for 1316 disruption to normal economic activity, including the deaths of tenants, is explained wholly in terms of warfare (with unusual deficits accounted for as *pro guerra* or *non plus causa guerre*) and without reference to such potential causative factors as harvest failure or adverse weather which do both feature at least on occasion in contemporary English manorial accounts.[14] Subsequent attempts to raise fines in the aftermath of the rebellion proved difficult and these failings were, by contrast, explained in terms of the unpropitious times, including livestock murrain, but, again, the visibility of the crisis is limited.[15]

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Given then the apparent opaqueness of the subject, and armed with the relatively little material we have, to what extent can we gain some understanding of the actual and relative experience of Wales in a period of famine? A first question we might ask in this respect relates to the relative vulnerability of Wales to famine. In terms of population a case could be made for identifying either a greater or lesser vulnerability, in comparison to, most obviously,

[13] On the rising, see especially Smith, 'Rebellion of Llewelyn Bren', pp. 72-86; see also Jordan, *Great famine*, p. 21.

[14] A. Hopkins, ed., *Medieval Neath. Ministers' accounts, 1262-1316* (Pontypool, 1988), pp. 65-96.

[15] Smith, 'Rebellion of Llewelyn Bren', p. 85.

neighbouring England. In so far as we can tell, Wales was not a densely populated country c. 1300, nor was the overall population very large. The recent estimate by Bruce Campbell and Lorraine Barry indicates that Wales' total population c. 1300 was no more than 300,000 (compared to 4.75 million for England), an estimate that agrees with that previously offered by William-Jones.[16] The size of population relative to the extent of land is also important in this respect; using the valuations of deaneries from the 1291 *Taxatio*, Campbell and Barry conclude, from their population estimates, that units of land comparable to the smaller English counties were inhabited by populations significantly smaller in most instances.[17] With the exception of the population in the area of St Davids, all units identified by Campbell and Barry fell well below the average population density for English counties in the same period. The overall population density for Wales, as calculated by Campbell, was 14.49 per km^2 while that for England was 33 per km^2.[18] Further, if we compare counties in England with those Welsh units of land of similar extent, as identified by Campbell using the *Taxatio* material, we find significant disparities between even the more thinly populated parts of England and most of Wales. So, for instance, the area including Brecon and its deaneries was estimated at similar extent to the county of Shropshire but with a population density two-thirds less (i.e. 9 per km^2 as compared to 27 per km^2).[19] A similar ratio of 1:3 operated between the similarly sized deanery-unit associated with Cardigan and the county of Cheshire

[16] B. M. S. Campbell and L. Barry, 'The population geography of Great Britain, c. 1290: a provisional reconstruction', in C. Briggs, P. M. Kitson and S. J. Thompson, eds, *Population, Welfare and Economic Change in Britain, 1290-1834* (Woodbridge, 2014), pp. 58-9; William-Jones, *Merioneth Lay Subsidy*, p. lix.

[17] It should be note that the 1291 *Taxatio* has been identified by William-Jones as problematic for such estimates, however, William-Jones, *Merioneth Lay Subsidy*, p. lxxvii.

[18] Campbell and Barry, 'Population geography', p. 59.

[19] Campbell and Barry, 'Population geography', pp. 53-61.

(i.e. 7 per km^2 as compared to 20 per km^2). This also suggests that, allowing for the two high density units associated with St Davids, the modal and median densities for these Welsh deanery units was very low, with one third of the country (in units) and almost one half in terms of actual area, populated by less than 10 persons per km^2.[20]

Did relative population density matter in terms of famine vulnerability? In other work Campbell had earlier identified the particular threat for eastern England from harvest failure; he described a highly dense part of the country occupied by large number of small-holders occupying insufficient land to sustain themselves and so highly dependent on opportunities for wage labour and external supplies of food available for purchase.[21] The same issues certainly did not apply throughout medieval Wales during the same period, any more than they did throughout England. We might even suppose that they hardly applied at all in Wales though that would be to take too careless a step. J. B. Smith has, for instance, suggested that, in medieval Glamorgan, at Senghennydd, the division of former demesnes of marcher lords amongst free tenants and their further sub-division by partible inheritance, may have created a significant degree of high density and 'an intense competition for arable holdings by the early fourteenth century'.[22] Instead, at least in some parts of Wales, the distinction must have existed between a relatively well-populated lowland and thinly populated uplands, of which

[20] Campbell and Barry, 'Population geography', pp. 57, 59.

[21] B. M. S. Campbell, 'The agrarian problem in the early fourteenth century', *Past and Present*, 188 (2005), 3-70. Compare the comments of the author of the *Vita Edward Secundi*, who suggests that grain prices were lower in less well-populated parts of England in 1316: *nam Londoniis et locis vicinis vendebatur modius tritici pro quadraginta denariis, et aliis partibus terre ubi minor erat concursus hominum triginta denarii erat commune precium*, *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, ed. W. R. Childs (Oxford, 2005), p. 120.

[22] J. B. Smith, 'The lordship of Senghennydd', in T.B. Pugh, ed., *Glamorgan County History. Volume III. The Middle Ages* (Cardiff, 1971), pp. 316-17.

Wales has an abundance, with more than one third of Wales' area (8000 square miles) above 800ft and 27 per cent above 1000ft.[23] Neither scenario, upland or lowland, indicates that we can categorically identify Wales as more or less vulnerable, however. As Stephen Devereux, in discussing demographic theories of famine, argues, we do not necessarily have to assume a consistent correlation between high population density and famine; instead, while acknowledging that, of course, highly dense population can place significant and sometimes overwhelming pressure on resources with serious and potentially fatal consequences for parts of that population, especially the poorest and least entitled, he also points out that low population density can have significant and negative consequences as well where those relatively small populations do not have sufficient control over resources, especially good access to land and food production.[24]

What of Wales, then, in this respect? The assumption, and the estimations to date, point to a generally low - but not consistently low - population density, of course. But what of resources and access to resources relative to this population?[25] There has been relatively little detailed work on Welsh and Marcher agrarian output in this period but one of the most thorough, by Ian Jack, is potentially revealing. Jack reviews the bulk of available evidence and pieces together a series of observations on land management, cropping practices and yield.[26] Much of this work does not tend to suggest that Wales was significantly

[23] R. Silvester, 'The archaeology of the Welsh uplands: an introduction', in D. Browne and S. Hughes, eds, *The Archaeology of the Welsh Uplands* (Aberystwyth, 2003), pp. 8-9.

[24] S. Devereux, *Theories of Famine* (Hemel Hempstead, 1993), p. 54.

[25] For earlier reflection on this and similar points, see Williams-Jones, ed., *Merioneth Lay Subsidy*, pp. cxxviii-ix.

[26] R. I. Jack, 'I. Farming techniques. Wales and the Marches' in H. E. Hallam, ed., *The Agrarian History of England and* Wales, volume *ii, 1042-1350* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 412-96.

disadvantaged relative to many parts of England. Grain yields in the second decade of the fourteenth century were certainly low, but not so remarkably low when compared to English demesne figures for the same period.[27] Perhaps most importantly in this respect is the general reliance on oats in Wales as the main cereal crop. While other grains were certainly grown across Wales, a combination of poor soil quality in upland regions, a likely general low standard of living, a ubiquity of livestock (especially cattle), encouraged the cultivation of oats which could sustain both human and animal populations. While oats were considered a poor quality grain, less dense than other cereals and therefore requiring greater amounts to supply a comparable calorific benefit to other bread grains, the advantage of oats in these circumstances is possibly significant in supporting the Welsh agrarian economy because oats coped well with poor growing conditions, better in fact than any other crop.[28] In Wales and in marcher and northern England, as well as in Devon and Cornwall in the middle ages, oats were, consistently, the main fodder crop, faring well on water-logged soils as well as upland margins.[29]

When we also review near-contemporary evidence for livestock holdings we find that, in many parts of upland and western Wales, the possession of significant holdings of cattle and sheep was considerable, certainly greater than that typically found on English peasant holdings of the same period where, to quote Postan, 'the frontier between corn and hoof had moved very far, indeed too far, cornwards'.[30] While Postan's pessimistic view of livestock

[27] Jack, 'I. Farming techniques. Wales and the Marches', p. 450. Compare, for instance, data from http://www.cropyields.ac.uk/ (copyright B.M.S. Campbell).

[28] B. M .S. Campbell, *English Seigniorial agriculture, 1250-1450* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 225.

[29] Campbell, *Seigniorial Agriculture*, pp. 225-6.

[30] C. Thomas, 'Thirteenth-century farm economies in North Wales', *Agricultural History Review* 16 (1968), 1-14; M. M. Postan, 'Village livestock in the thirteenth century', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., xv (1962);

units in medieval England has since undergone some upward revision, the distribution of livestock in north wales, as described by Colin Thomas, for instance, suggests an economy in which livestock holdings, especially cattle and, in the later middle ages, sheep were of major significance.[31] While also there is plentiful evidence for clearance of waste and assarting, the mixed economy of medieval Wales, less dependent than parts of England on grain production, meant that uplands were as important for pasture as they were for low returns arising from cereal cultivation. Landscape archaeology suggests a developed use of uplands, including a process of transhumance between winter *hendre* and summer *hafod* which was already in place in the high middle ages but underwent some retreat in the later middle ages.[32] As we will discuss a little later, when we consider inequalities of wealth in this period, cattle and oxen featured prominently in many peasant economies, especially where we able to identify this most clearly in the north of Wales; the high prevalence of cattle herds added to the mixed nature of the Welsh economy and may have increased the proportion of proteinous content in the Welsh diet when compared with the heavily cereal-based diet of the English, even allowing for the considerable local variety in Welsh agrarian organisation.[33] In addition, we can point to slight evidence for other kinds of activity which may have helped to bolster local economies and to sustain their populations; as, for instance, the limited evidence for trading through shipping, for which there is some for towns such as Pwllheli in the later

also published in M. M. Postan, *Essays on Medieval Agriculture and General Problems of the Medieval Economy* (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 214-48; see also Williams-Jones, ed., *Merioneth Lay Subsidy*, p. cxxvii.

[31] Thomas, 'Thirteenth-century farm economies in North Wales'.

[32] Browne and Hughes, eds, *Archaeology of the Welsh uplands*.

[33] Williams-Jones, *Merioneth Lay Subsidy*, pp. cxiii-cxxi.

middle ages.[34] Sea fishing was also sufficiently vigorous and important to local economies that it also attracted the attention of the English exchequer and, on the few occasions when lay subsidies were assessed and/or levied in Wales in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, nets, boats and other moveables associated with fishing were included as part of lay wealth and identified in the assessments for fishing communities such as Cafflogion and Nefyn.[35]

It appears though all but impossible to go beyond such general contextual statements in considering the potential importance of such non-arable foodstuffs for the sustenance of the Welsh population in this period. Jack concludes that Welsh agriculture in this period displayed a pragmatic commitment to mixed husbandry, of a quality that may, conceivably, have helped insulate Welsh society to some degree from harvest failures and murrains.[36] Certainly, the pressure on resources can seldom, if ever, have been so intense as that experienced in parts of eastern England, say, where smallholders and cottagers operated too close to a dependency on waged labour and too far from their own direct subsistence to be safe from dramatic price hikes of the kind seen in the early fourteenth century. Finally, we should also note, of course, that there were competing claims to the resources of the inhabitants of Wales and the marches. While unlike in those parts of England, especially eastern England, which suffered from a variety of forms of taxation including the imposition of lay subsidies, prises and purveyance, later thirteenth and early fourteenth century Wales

[34] T. Jones Pierce, 'A Caernarvonshire manorial borough: studies in the medieval history of Pwllheli', in J. Beverley Smith, ed., *Medieval Welsh Society. Selected Essays by T. Jones Pierce* (Cardiff, 1972), pp. 127-93, on which see also C. Dyer, 'Modern perspectives on medieval Welsh towns', in R. A. Griffiths and P. R. Schofield, eds, *Wales and the Welsh in the Middle Ages* (Cardiff, 2011), p. 170.

[35] Williams-Jones, *Merioneth Lay Subsidy*, p. xiv.

[36] We know little of murrains and bovine epidemics in Wales, as yet; Slavin, 'Great bovine pestilence', 1266, includes some information from Monmouthshire suggestive of significant livestock losses on six manors there, c. 1320.

escaped the worst demands of parliamentary and extraordinary taxation, the country was subject instead to the demands of lordship which, according to Rees Davies, acted as a significant drain upon resources;[37] in both England and Wales in this period the cost of warfare, either through levies to fund it (as in England) or in the direct and indirect consequences (as in Wales) served to reduce resources and to adjust entitlements, something that must have acted to the detriment of the least advantaged in both countries.[38]

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None of the above suggests that Wales, despite its relatively low population density, and the particular qualities of its mixed economy, was not vulnerable to famine however. Before we risk any conclusions in this respect, we should move from discussion of context to a survey of the kinds of available evidence which permit a more developed view of the impact of famine in Wales and the Marches in this period. In this respect, and to follow historians of famine in medieval England, we can identify loosely demographic evidence, especially evidence for deaths, as well as indices of socio-economic adjustment or disruption.[39] While the kinds of source that might permit a narrative based on yield and fluctuations in price and wages do not exist for Wales to anything approaching the extent they survive for England in this period, it is possible to look at some of the ways in which people responded to what, in

[37] R. R. Davies, *The Age of conquest: Wales, 1063-1415* (Oxford, 1987), p. 402.

[38] For England, see, for example, J. R. Maddicott, The English peasantry and the demands of the crown 1294–1341, *Past and Present Supplement* I (1975); W. M. Ormrod, 'The crown and the English economy, 1290-1348', in B. M. S. Campbell, ed., *Before the Black Death. Studies in the 'Crisis' of the Early Fourteenth Century* (Manchester, 1991), pp. 149-183

[39] Kershaw, 'Agrarian crisis'.

so far as we can tell, was a period of significantly heightened food prices and of widespread scarcity.

To begin with demographic responses to famine is to accept that the population history of Wales in this period is almost entirely lacking in the kinds of material that allow any developed argument. While, as we have seen, some estimates of total population have been offered, it is all but impossible to discuss fluctuations in mortality or identify periods of demographic crisis with any great precision.[40] Historians of medieval England have looked to a limited range of estate documentation, including records of tenant deaths in manorial court rolls, in order to estimate total mortality and chart year on year changes. Given differences in landholding, land management and the general lack of comparable record types, such attempts are less available for Wales and the Welsh March. We can though point to a few indicative instances which hint at patterns consistent with demographic crisis in this period.

For medieval England, population historians have used a variety of source types in order to attempt to piece together some demographic details. While Inquisitions *post mortem* and institutions to benefices have offered some insight into higher status mortality, and particular local and institutional studies have offered further insights into the demography of closed groups (monastic communities; schools), death duty payments recorded in manorial court rolls have provided the most ubiquitous source for attempting a general mapping of the demography of the bulk of the population, i.e. rural dwellers, and especially villein tenants of the larger, record-keeping landlords. For Wales, some few instances of similar material survive from the local and central courts of Marcher lordships, notably the lordship of

[40] W. Rees is able to chart in considerable detail the progress of plague deaths in mid-fourteenth century Ruthin using court rolls but often the history of epidemic disease in other parts of Wales is dependent on less immediate indicators, such as changes in rents of assize, W. Rees, 'The Black Death in England and Wales, as exhibited in manorial documents', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine* 16 (1923), 27-45, and especially, pp. 30-2 and, *idem*, 'The Black Death in Wales', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 3 (1920), 115-35.

Dyffryn Clwyd. This well-known series of records was catalogued and made machine-readable in the 1990s by a team at Aberystwyth led by Rees Davies and Llinos Smith.[41] We will use some of the detail from this material in what follows in order to look, firstly, at evidence for famine mortality recorded in the rolls before turning to other potentially instructive indices of disruption.

To begin, then, with mortality is to agree, in general terms, with Ian Kershaw that 'compared with the Black Death years, ...the court rolls of the famine period often show nothing untoward unless closely examined'.[42] Payments of *ebediw* and *gobrestyn* (by Welsh tenants) or relief (by English tenants)[43] to take on holdings left by their dead relatives do not display an obvious pattern, in and of themselves, consistent with famine or harvest failure. As the data in Table 1 suggests, the simple numerical peaks do not coincide with what, from English price data, we know to have been the worst of the harvest years, especially 1315 and 1316, and in fact it would be hard to detect a simple mortality pattern consistent with crisis occasioned by harvest failure.[44] However, set in the context of the totality of land transfer information from the Dyffryn Clwyd listings, the *post-mortem* data does hint at underlying patterns consistent with crisis. In the first instance, the relative percentage of *post-mortem* transfers looks to have increased in the period of the Great Famine. Contrary to what is seen

[41] The Dyffryn Clwyd examples use here are recorded in the project database, DCCRD; see above, n. 9, for further details. In preparing this paper, microfilm copy of TNA SC 2 215/71-216/3 has also been consulted.

[42] Kershaw, 'Agrarian crisis', p. 119; compare the data on deaths gathered by the 'Dyffryn Clwyd' project, A. D. M. Barrell *et al*., 'The Dyffryn Clwyd court roll project, 1340-1352 and 1389-1399: a methodology and some preliminary findings', in Z. Razi and R. Smith, *Medieval Society and the Manor Court* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 290-1.

[43] Barrell *et al*., 'Dyffryn Clwyd court roll project', p. 290 on these distinctions.

[44] In one instance, the 'death' is actually not literal in that the outgoing tenant is not dead but *leprosus*, DCCRD 'Reliefs' file, entry #265.

on some, indeed many, manors in England, this percentage increase is a consequence of a general decline in *inter-vivos* transfers for the same years and an general decline in the total number of transfers, both *post-mortem* and *inter-vivos*.

Table 1. Dyffryn Clwyd: Land transfers, 1311-1319

Year	*Post mortem*			*%*	*Inter-vivos*		*%*	Total
	ebediw	relief	other		surrender	other (incl. fine paid to enter)		
1311-12	14	1	1	*26.7*	23	21	*73.3*	60
1312-13	8	2		*17.2*	37	11	*82.8*	58
1313-14	6	2		*25.0*	20	4	*75.0*	32
1314-15	5	3		*17.8*	32	5	*82.2*	45
1315-16	7	3		*34.5*	14	5	*65.5*	29
1316-17	5	2	4	*34.4*	19	2	*65.6*	32
1317-18	5		1	*20.7*	12	11	*79.3*	29
1318-19	10	4		*35.0*	8	18	*65.0*	40

Source: TNA SC2/215/71-216/2, as catalogued in DCCRD file: Reliefs.

While then there is no evidence for a significant increase in tenant deaths, the changing pattern of land transfers in total suggests a shift in the normal patterns of dealing. This is particularly the case when we turn to the *inter-vivos* data, and especially the relative proportions of surrenders (in which a tenant comes into court and surrenders his property to the use (*ad opus*) of another, incoming tenant; in other words, transactions that come close to the buying and selling of holdings between parties) and the category 'other'. This latter category includes a significant number of individuals who were prepared to pay a fine to the

lord so that they might be granted entry to the property; in certain instances, this reflects not a transfer between equal parties but the preparedness of a new tenant to take on land which had returned to the lord's hands through such things as the infirmity or flight of the previous tenant. While we do not see an increase in the number of surrenders *ad opus* we do witness an apparent increase, especially in some of the most difficult years, of individuals paying fines to the lord for entry to land. This is especially the case in 1311-13 and 1317-19 and it is tempting, and in some cases it is evidently correct so to do, to label at least some these as transfers occasioned by distress, while also acknowledging that in other cases they could possibly be more typical surrenders or even 'after the fact' *post-mortem* transfers. So, most obviously, of the 29 fines paid to enter holdings between 1317 and 1319, in the years immediately after the first and worst of the harvest failures and during the major livestock epidemic of 1319, a number of entries are explained in terms of the poverty or debility of the 'outgoing' tenant. In some such instances, it seems to be the case that the impecunious or weakened tenant had in fact leased or demised their land and the incoming tenant or, rather, lessee paid the lord to recognise their own interest in the property as a leasehold. Such an instance, for example occurred in Easter 1318, when Gwerful ferch Ieuan relinquished her tenement *propter debilitatem* to Einion Goh de Coruedewen, a bondman, for the term of Gwerful's life.[45] In other instances, the release by the outgoing tenement is evidently without term, as in Michaelmas 1318, where Einion ap Dd, also a bondman, took a holding for villein services previously held by Ieuan ap Vathleoun 'who relinquished the said land because of poverty'.[46] In total, between Easter 1317 and Michaelmas 1318, six of the fines paid to enter land previously vacated by a tenant were explained directly in terms of the debility or poverty of the outgoing tenant. Earlier, in 1315-16, at least three of the five fines paid to enter

[45] DCCRD 'Reliefs' file, entry #379

[46] DCCRD 'Reliefs' file, entry #395

holdings related to the poverty of the departing tenant, as is made clear in the transfer details.[47] Perhaps as importantly, in no other years was poverty or debility used to explain such transfers, not even in 1311-12, which has some claim, if we take into account grain price data and English mortality data, as well as the Dyffryn Clwyd data, to be judged a period of significant crisis occasioned by harvest failure.

As also in England in this same period, some of the more robust indications of crisis and an inherent vulnerability in society reside in evidence of dislocation and unusual patterns of socio-economic behaviour. Alongside the land transfer data, as discussed, we can also review shifts in normal patterns relating to litigation and to prosecutions for theft. To begin with litigation, and in particular, to focus upon litigation in debt, the Dyffryn Clwyd rolls do suggest compelling patterns. Analysis of debt cases for the commote of Llanerch for the decade 1312-1322 reveals a significant fluctuation in the number of annual debt cases.[48] As Table 2 shows, a dramatic peak in debts and detinue (unjust detention) cases occurred in 1316, at the height of the famine elsewhere in Europe and the period of highest grain prices.

[47] DCCRD 'Reliefs' file, entry #s 274, 275, 286; see also TNA SC 2 215/75, court of 31 March, 1316, for the surrender of eight acres of villein land by Ieuan Gogh of Clocaenog (possibly the same Ieuan Gogh, bondman of Aberchwiler in 'Reliefs' file, entry # 286) *pro paupertate* to Eignon ap Madd'.

[48] It should be noted that an initial analysis of litigation in debt and detinue for the associated unit of Aberchwiler and the Great Court at Dyffryn Clwyd does not however suggest the same patterns, perhaps reflective of a highly localised economic context or, as Briggs has noted for medieval England, a tendency for certain local courts to feature more prominently than others as effective fora for debt recovery, C. Briggs, 'Manor court procedures, debt litigation levels, and rural credit provision in England, c.1290-c.1380', *Law and History Review*, 23 (2006), 519-58.

Table 2. Debt pleas: Llanerch, 1312-1322

Year	Courts per annum	debt	detinue	total
1312	10	2		2
1313	9		1	1
1314	10	2	1	3
1315	3		2	2
1316	6	9	8	17
1317	8	1		1
1318	7	1		1
1319	9	3		3
1320	3	1	1	2
1321	7			0
1322	3	1	1	2

Source: DCCRD file: Llan1; TNA SC2/215/71-216/2

Historians researching this event and observing similar patterns in England have been tempted to identify such changes with the pursuit of the impecunious by their creditors at times of generally straitened circumstances.[49] There is no good reason not to accept the general tenor of this but closer analysis also suggests some nuancing. If we consider a little more closely the Llanerch debt and detinue cases from 1316 we can make a series of general observations. In the first place, the sums involved are often not small. In some instances, we can see a minor creditor recovering a relatively small sum, as in the claim for 18d. in arrears owed for harvest work but in most others the sums recovered or sought are quite large, ranging from 2s 6d to almost 20s in cash and involving even larger sums of grain, including amounts as large as 4 quarters of oats in a single contract (i.e. roughly enough grain to sustain

[49] See, for instance, P. R. Schofield, 'The social economy of the medieval village', *Economic History Review*, 61 S1 (2008), 38-63.

a family of four for a year).[50]Important in this respect also is that credit was not being extended at these points but withdrawn and, on occasion, it appears that the larger debts, which are either in cash or more typically in grain, were sometimes being recovered some months after the original agreed date for repayment. So, for instance, the commotal court in April 1316 found that Llywelyn Voyl owed Cyn ap Adda 9s 2d for an ox, the sum for which should have been paid almost a year earlier, on 31st May 1315.[51] In other instances, the parties, possibly feeling the pressure of heightened economic conditions, might cavil over the agreed date for repayment, as in early May 1316 when, in the Great Court of Dyffryn Clwyd, John son of Maud de Prestende claimed that Emma de Bexton unjustly detained 10s owed for a quarter of oats; Emma acknowledged the debt but successfully claimed that she had until Pentecost, at the end of the month, to repay the sum.[52]

In addition, and a factor that helps explain the large number of detinue cases in 1316, plaintiffs appear often to have pursued the pledges to the original agreement and not the principal debtor; this likely reflects both the difficulty of extracting the debt from the debtor but also the opportunities to claim damages against third parties, i.e. the pledges, a development also evident in English manorial courts in this period.[53] For instance, in April 1316, Ithel ap Einion brought a plea of unjust detention (detinue) against Dd ap Heilyn de

[50] DCCRD 'Llan1' file, entry #636, and more generally DCCRD 'Llan1' file; this differs from William-Jones' earlier assessment that loans were not large, a comment based on the published Dyffryn Clwyd court rolls, William-Jones, *Merioneth Lay Subsidy*, p. xxii.

[51] DCCRD 'Llan1' file, entry #658. Some debts could be held over for much longer, as a debt of 23d. owed by Roger Knith to William le Barker for hides, which, by 1312, had been owing for 3 years, DCCRD 'GC1' file, entry #384.

[52] DCCRD 'GC1' file, entry #1075.

[53] Schofield, 'Social economy'.

Brenkemyn and Madog Vaghan ap Madog ap Hywel who he claimed unjustly detained from him 6 hopae of wheat, worth 12s, and 1 hopa of oat flour, which was valued at 2s which Llywelyn Voyl ought to have paid at the previous Christmas (1315) and for whom Dd ap Heilyn and Madog Vaghan were pledges in the original agreement. A jury decided that the pledges, Dd ap Heilyn and Madog Vaghan, should pay the sum owed.[54] Similarly, in September 1316, William le Serjeant (of Ruthin), a well-known litigant at Ruthin as noted by Matthew Stevens in his study of Ruthin,[55] pursued John de Meles, Adam Bole and Robert Miller (molendinarius), the pledges of his original debtor, Philip Herigaud, for the huge sum of 4 quarters of oats which the plaintiff's wife, Agnes, had paid over to the debtor, Philip, at the feast of All Saints (1 November 1315, i.e. almost a year earlier). The plaintiff agreed that the debtor had repaid part of the sum but the considerable amount of 2 quarters and 10 hopae was outstanding, valued by the plaintiff at 16s per quarter, a high price for oats (or indeed any grain) and which possibly reflects the current market price. The issue, which hinged on a separate agreement for a transfer of a unit land by the debtor to the plaintiff intended to cover the additional part of the debt, was put to compurgation.[56]

In all such instances of late recovery we can detect the heightened needs of the creditor, perhaps forced into recovering debts that had otherwise been allowed to run. We might also suspect that creditors who sought recovery at the height of the famine and one of the highest points for grain prices in 1316, - if not indeed the highest as April 1316 came at the very end of a famine winter and before the new harvest, poor as it was destined to be, was

[54] DCCRD 'Llan1' file, entry #652. See also DCCRD 'Llan1' file, entry #637. In such instances, pledges sometimes then pursued the original debtor with their own pleas, e.g. DCCRD 'Llan1' file, entry #672, 674.

[55] M. F. Stevens, *Urban Assimilation in Post-conquest Wales. Ethnicity, Gender and Economy in Ruthin* (Cardiff, 2010), p. 103.

[56] DCCRD 'Llan1' file, entry #713.

available[57] – may have been speculating in a number of ways: (i) recovering grain which they could sell on at high prices; (ii) recovering coin with which they could purchase grain and/or lend to new and eager debtors; (iii) using the terms of their original agreement to recover goods valued in grain at a point when the price of grain was exorbitant; as well as, (iv) securing capital against debtors whose own stock was falling at an increased rate during a period of crisis.

The litigation over debt at Dyffryn Clwyd and the relatively large sums pursued point towards disparities in individual wealth as well as some of the possible tactics employed by the relatively wealthy in holding on to and perhaps adding to their wealth, even during difficult times. Just as the work of Campbell and Bartley has shown to be the case for the distribution of wealth in medieval England,[58] William-Jones and Ian Jack have both usefully illustrated, through their work using the few surviving lay subsidies for Wales from this period, that not only different parts of Wales but also sub-regions and localities could display quite marked differences in levels of wealth.[59] At the level of the individual, relativities of wealth are also revealed by the surviving lay subsidy listings, both in terms of returns and assessments, as well as in rentals showing disparities in the extent of landholdings. At the commote of Penllyn (Merionethshire), the fragment of the 1318 'local' lay subsidy rolls, which records moveable goods and livestock subject to assessment, illustrates the significant inequalities in wealth amongst taxpayers within individual vills. So, for instance, at Pennaran in the parish of Llanuwchllyn, the assessed taxable wealth, estimated at a 15th of the total

[57] See also D. Stone, *Decision-making in Medieval Agriculture* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 48-9, on the movement of grain prices across the farming year and the preparedness of manorial officers to manage the same.

[58] B. M. S. Campbell and K. Bartley, *England on the Eve of the Black Death. An Atlas of Lay Lordship, Land and Wealth, 1300-49* (Manchester, 2006).

[59] William-Jones, *Merioneth Lay Subsidy*, pp. lxviii-lxxx.

wealth for an individual, ranged from 11s. $10^{3/4}$d assessed against Tudur ap Houel, who owned 7 oxen, 26 cows, 17 draught animals (averia) of either three-or two-years old, 2 mares, 8 sheep (oves) and 8 (80 bushels) crannocks of oats to 7d. owed by Phelip Du for 2 cows and 5 sheep. Most households occupied a middle ground between the two extremes.[60] Similar distinctions and general patterns are evident from other surviving taxation listings, as the results gathered by Thomas and Jack illustrate; so, at Lleyn in the 1290s, most households owned a fairly consistent head of livestock but one or two households greatly outweighed their peers in the extent of their livestock units.[61] Rentals also suggest distinctions in extent of landholding and, by association, wealth; the Dyffryn Clwyd rental for 1324, for example, displays considerable disparities in holding size so that, at the commote of Dogfeiling, holdings varied greatly from units of 80 acres or more to smallholdings of no more than a single acre.[62] This contrast in relative wealth is further illustrated by the rare listing of possessions of a poorer man who fled the lordship of Dyffryn Clwyd in 1320 to escape justice; indicted for the theft of a hopa of salt from the castle granary at Ruthin, Robert Carter (*carectarius*) left behind a number of his worldly goods which were then sold; these included bread worth 1d; 1 courtepi or short jacket worth 5d; 1 weak tunic worth 14d; 2 old and weak muzzles with straps worth 4d; 1 hood worth 8d; another hood worth 5d; 1 pair of stockings and 1 pair of boots as well as 1 pair of weak shoes, worth in total 3d; a pair of gloves worth 1/2d; 1 chest worth 6d and a tapestry worth 3d. Assuming he did not take a great deal with

[60] Williams-Jones, *Merioneth Lay Subsidy roll*, pp. 96-9.

[61] See, for example, R. I. Jack, 'Social structure. Wales and the Marches' in Hallam, ed., *Agrarian History of England and* Wales, ii, pp. 707-14.

[62] Observations drawn from Dyffryn Clwyd database, DCCRD 'Rental' file, which draws upon the following edition, R. I. Jack, 'Records of Denbighshire lordship, II - the lordship of Dyffryn-Clwyd in 1324', *Transactions of the Denbighshire Historical Society*, *xvii* (1968), 7-53.

him, the total value of his goods, 4s 1½d., would have brought him below the level of wealth appropriate for assessment (assuming a 15th) in contemporary lay subsidies for England.[63]

These social distinctions, which tend to be thrown into sharp relief at moments of shortage and crisis, may also be revealed through analysis of evidence for theft at Dyffryn Clwyd before, during and after the famine years. Barbara Hanawalt's study of crime in the early fourteenth-century English countryside showed how certain types of crime, especially crimes such as theft, featured with greater prominence during years of hardship, harvest failure and apparent distress. Hanawalt mapped crime figures, recorded in, *inter alia*, gaol delivery, coroners' and assize rolls, against price movements and described a striking coincidence of high grain prices and increased criminal activity.[64] Thefts recorded in the Great Court at Dyffryn Clwyd, in which the lordship retained jurisdiction over the kinds of criminal offences that might otherwise have gone to the crown in England, show a similar pattern with noticeable peaks in 1316-17 but also 1320 and 1322, as Table 3 shows.

[63] DCCRD 'GC1' file, entry #1505; on assessed levels and liability to pay lay subsidies, see M. Jurkowski, C. L. Smith, D. Crook, *Lay Taxes in England and Wales, 1188-1688* (Public Record Office, 1998), pp. xxix-xxx.

[64] B. A. Hanawalt, *Crime and Conflict in English communities*, 1300-1348 (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), pp. 238-60.

Table 3. Thefts: Great Court of Ruthin, 1312-1322

Year	Courts per annum (n)	Theft (total number)	Grain	Livestock	other/unknown
1312	2	5	1		4
1313	2	3	1	1	1
1314	3	8	2	3	3
1315	1	2			2
1316	2	20	8	9	3
1317	1	19	5	4	10
1318	1				
1319	2	2			2
1320	1	28	6	5	17
1321	1	5	3	2	
1322	2	25	15	6	4

Source: DCCRD file: GC1.

In terms of goods stolen, the years 1316 and 1322, both famine years, stand out as years in which thieves turned their attention to grain and livestock (unlike in 1320 when goods other than food were more obviously targeted). This is entirely consistent with patterns identified in England at the same time; theft cases dealt with by Kent Justices of the Peace showed a significant upturn in thefts of grain in 1316-17 (26 of 76 cases), in comparison to surrounding years (1308-9, 7 of 112 cases), for instance.[65] If we consider the kinds of thefts but also those indicted for theft in the most prominent of the years, 1316, 1317, 1320 and 1322, we can also make a series of observations regarding the typology of thieves. In the first instance, as Table 4 illustrates, women and unmarried girls were more likely to steal grain, especially in small measures, and, if we distinguish the broad category of livestock between oxen, cattle and sheep, on the one hand, and smaller livestock, such as lambs, and poultry on the other, they were also far more likely to be stealers of poultry than were men (who were more often indicted for thefts of larger livestock as well as well as larger units of livestock),

[65] Kershaw, 'Agrarian crisis', p. 95.

as in April 1316 when Tangwystl, the daughter of Tegwared ap Rhys was indicted for the theft of a duck.[66] In 1316, the bulk of recorded thefts of grain involved very small amounts and typically also involved female thieves, as in May 1316 when Alice le Blowstere was indicted for theft of malt worth 3d.[67] It is not clear if this indicates that women were more vulnerable and forced to turn to crime or if theft of small items of foodstuffs reflected a female role in poorer households; it is though worth noting, as Stevens has identified in his study of Ruthin, that women featured prominently as sellers of land in the worst of the famine years.[68]

Table 4. Theft: gender breakdown. Great Court of Ruthin, 1312-1322

Year	Theft (total number)	Grain/ legumes/ fruit	Female (%)	Livestock/ poultry	Female (%)	other/unknown	Female (%)
1316	20	8	5 (62.5)	9	3 (33.3)	3	-
1317	19	5	1 (20.0)	4		10	
1320	28	6	2 (33.3)	5		17	1 (5.90)
1322	25	15	7 (46.7)	6		4	3 (75.0)

Source: DCCRD file: GC1

One further feature of interest, in terms of the recording of theft in the Dyffryn Clwyd rolls, was the difficulty of bringing perpetrators to justice. In some cases this appears to have been because the other parties were not inclined to pursue matters; in other respects, suspected thieves could not be seized because they had fled. In fact, references to fugitives

[66] DCCRD GC1 file, entry #1118

[67] DCCRD GC1 file, entry #1078. The proportion of smaller units stolen is also potentially revealing, with 50 per cent of measures of grain stolen in 1316, 80 per cent in 1317 and 46.7 per cent in 1322 identifiable as small measures, i.e. less than a bushel; this compares with 33.3 per cent in 1320, a year when grain prices were not so high. Similarly, small animal/poultry theft is especially evident in 1316 (33.3 per cent) and 1317 (50 per cent).

[68] Stevens, *Urban Assimilation*, p. 202.

appear to have increased in 1316, for instance, but also in 1320, during another period of increased crime. Such periods of apparent disruption and general difficulty may have caused a breakdown in more typical communal ties and encouraged greater movement of people, especially those propelled from their own communities in search of better opportunities elsewhere.[69]

Modern as well as contemporary accounts of famine describe the lure of towns and cities for the desperate poor, reduced to begging and starvation and hoping that larger urban centres may offer salvation, either through opportunity for paid employment or through charity. Certainly, we know that major cities in Europe attracted disproportionately vast numbers of the poor and needy, and the middle-ranking English towns fulfilled similar functions.[70] It is less clear that the even smaller Welsh towns, such as Ruthin as discussed by Matthew Stevens or other such effective local urban centres recently discussed by Christopher Dyer,[71] did the same and we should perhaps look to any surviving evidence from the main urban centres bordering Wales and the March, such as Chester, Shrewsbury, Hereford, Worcester, Gloucester or Bristol, for evidence of in-migration by poor Welshmen and women in this period. To date, there has been little or no such work on western English towns and it may simply not be possible to identify significant in-migration of a kind that has

[69] Dyffryn Clwyd court roll project, DCCRD 'GC1' file, references to fugitives by year: 1299 (2); 1307 (1); 1312 (3); 1313 (1); 1316 (9); 1317 (1); 1320 (12); 1321 (2). Not all such references necessarily relate to out-migration occasioned by shortage; in some instances, the individual is a fugitive from justice though we might, in any case, also argue for an association between harvest failure, increased criminality, and the subsequent flight of the perpetrators.

[70] E. Rutledge, 'Immigration and population growth in early fourteenth-century Norwich: evidence from the tithing roll', *Urban History Yearbook* 15 (1988), 15-30.

[71] Stevens, *Urban assimilation*; Dyer, 'Medieval Welsh towns'.

been observed for eastern English towns, such as Norwich, in this period.[72] We do know, of course, that there was significant movement of Welsh people to and from English towns in this period but most of that movement in so far as it is observable seems to relate to higher level trade and other activities that suggest a degree of personal wealth and therefore insulation from the worst effects of grain and livestock shortage. So, for instance, the Chester Crownmote roll for 1316, the worst year of the Great Famine, records a plaint by a Iorwerth Vach against a Richard Sersel for the alleged theft of an ox, while an entry in the Pentice Roll for Chester, possibly from the same year though the dating is uncertain, includes reference to a Madog ap David sued for trespass.[73] However, from time to time, there is evidence of mobility occasioned by desperation. The Great Court at Ruthin records one instance of out-migration on account of poverty in this period; significantly it is in April 1316, at the height of the famine and relates to 'a certain bondman who left the county (?) on account of poverty'.[74] In later years, further instances of out-migration are recorded in the commotal court at Llanerch where, in 1332, a bondman, Madog ap Philip, surrendered his land in order to go to England to beg.[75]

[72] Rutledge, 'Immigration and population growth'. For a tantalising glimpse of urban in-migration from the early fourteenth century provided by isotopic investigation of skeletal remains from the Black Death cemetery at Smithfield (London) as well as the suggestion that some in-migrants came from Wales and were of an age to have been potential famine-induced migrants, see E .J. Kendall, J. Montgomery, J. A. Evans, C. Stantis and V. Mueller, 'Mobility, mortality, and the middle ages: identification of migrant individuals in a fourteenth century Black Death cemetery population', *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, 150 (2013), pp. 219, 220.

[73] *Selected Rolls of the Chester City courts. Late Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries*, ed. A. Hopkins (Chetham Society, 1950), p. 30; Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, ZSR/20, m. 1 (face).

[74] TNA SC 215/75, m.15.

[75] TNA SC 216/12, m.25d.

Glimpses of individuals such as Madog ap Philip and their plight force us to acknowledge that, despite much of the evidence gathered here which offers limited indices of change and disruption, the significant features of disruption, especially the experience of the particularly vulnerable, the very young, the elderly and infirm, the poor, that is those less 'entitled' - to use a standard of Amartya Sen's theorisation of the operation of famines - will be all but hidden. It is next-to impossible to add flesh to the bones of some of the small but suggestive details here. The best we can do is to propose that such features of disruption and turmoil (such as a proportionate increase in the deaths of tenants, increased flurries of litigation or shifts in the patterns of crime) are, for the more vulnerable sections of society, indications of even more severe impacts. These will almost certainly have been more severe – so, loss of credit for a middle-ranking peasant may have led to reduction in commitments to those beneath him or her with dire consequences for the latter, including loss of livelihood, possible recourse to crime, and even loss of life. It is also likely that these different experiences operated to differing timescales, with the most vulnerable the least able to withstand such pressures and more likely to fail earlier than their wealthier counterparts. What stands for parts of Wales, where certain prevailing conditions can be described, may not be representative of the whole; however, given the patterns described here tend to replicate features observable in England and other parts of Europe in this period, it is possible to suggest that the experiences recoverable for parts of the population are likely to have been more generally, if not universally, applicable. Undoubtedly there were unique and particular conditions, in terms of relative population densities and prevailing social structures, types of husbandries, the extent of access to alternative food sources or of exposure to political and military turmoil, which caused some parts of Wales and the people living there to be more or less advantaged in the face of famine and shortage. The same is largely true for all societies facing such calamitous events. Whether though Wales, in general terms or in its constituent

parts, suffered more or less than its neighbours in this period, is not something upon which we can offer an informed opinion.
